

ROBERT ELSMERE

—

GLADSTONE

1888











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**ROBERT ELSMERE**

—AND—

**The Battle of Belief.**

—BY—

**RT. HON. WM. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.**

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'ROBERT ELSMERE'  
AND THE BATTLE OF BELIEF.<sup>1</sup>

HUMAN NATURE, when aggrieved, is apt and quick in devising compensations. The increasing seriousness and strain of our present life may have had the effect of bringing about the large preference, which I understand to be exhibited in local public libraries, for works of fiction. This is the first expedient of revenge. But it is only a link in a chain. The next step is, that the writers of what might be grave books, *in esse* or *in posse*, have endeavoured with some success to circumvent the multitude. Those who have systems or hypotheses to recommend in philosophy, conduct, or religion induct them into the costume of romance. Such was the second expedient of nature, the counterstroke of her revenge. When this was done in *Télémaque*, *Rasselas*, or *Caleb's*, it was not without literary effect. Even the last of these three appears to have been successful with its own generation. It would now be deemed intolerably dull. But a dull book is easily renounced. The more didactic fictions of the present day, so far as I know them, are not dull. We take them up, however, and we find that, when we meant to go to play, we have gone to school. The romance is a gospel of some philosophy, or of some religion; and requires sustained thought on many or some of the deepest subjects, as the only rational alternative to placing ourselves at the mercy of our author. We find that he has put upon us what is not indeed a treatise, but more formidable than if it were. For a treatise must rather beg the question it seeks to decide, but must carry its reader onwards by reasoning patiently from step to step. But the writer of the romance, under the convenient necessity which his form imposes, skips in thought, over undefined distances, from stage to stage, as a bee from flower to flower. A creed may (as here) be accepted in a sentence, and then abandoned in a page. But we the common herd of readers, if we are to deal with the consequences, to accept or repel the influence of the book, must, as in a problem of mathematics, supply the missing steps. Thus, in perusing as we ought a propagandist romance, we must terribly increase the pace; and it is the pace that kills.

Among the works to which the preceding remarks might apply,

<sup>1</sup> *Robert Elsmere*. By Mrs. Humphry Ward, Author of *Miss Bretherton*. In 3 vols. London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1888.

the most remarkable within my knowledge is *Robert Elsmere*. It is indeed remarkable in many respects. It is a novel of nearly twice the length, and much more than twice the matter, of ordinary novels. It dispenses almost entirely, in the construction of what must still be called its plot, with the aid of incident in the ordinary sense. We have indeed near the close a solitary individual crushed by a waggon, but this catastrophe has no relation to the plot, and its only purpose is to exhibit a good deathbed in illustration of the great missionary idea of the piece. The *nexus* of the structure is to be found wholly in the workings of character. The assumption and the surrender of a Rectory are the most salient events, and they are simple results of what the actor has thought right. And yet the great, nay, paramount function of character-drawing, the projection upon the canvas of human beings endowed with the true forces of nature and vitality, does not appear to be by any means the master-gift of the authoress. In the mass of matter which she has prodigally expended there might obviously be retrenchment; for there are certain laws of dimension which apply to a novel, and which separate it from an epic. In the extraordinary number of personages brought upon the stage in one portion or other of the book, there are some which are elaborated with greater pains and more detail, than their relative importance seems to warrant. *Robert Elsmere* is hard reading, and requires toil and effort. Yet, if it be difficult to persist, it is impossible to stop. The prisoner on the treadmill must work severely to perform his task: but if he stops he at once receives a blow which brings him to his senses. Here, as there, it is human infirmity which shrinks; but here, as not there, the propelling motive is within. Deliberate judgment and deep interest alike rebuke a fainting reader. The strength of the book, overbearing every obstacle, seems to lie in an extraordinary wealth of diction, never separated from thought; in a close and searching faculty of social observation; in generous appreciation of what is morally good, impartially<sup>2</sup> exhibited in all directions: above all in the sense of mission with which the writer is evidently possessed, and in the earnestness and persistency of purpose with which through every page and line it is pursued. The book is eminently an offspring of the time, and will probably make a deep or at least a very sensible impression; not, however, among mere novel-readers, but among those who spare, in whatever sense, the deeper thought of the period.

The action begins in a Westmoreland valley, where the three young daughters of a pious clergyman are grouped around a mother infirm in health and without force of mind. All responsibility devolves accordingly upon Catherine, the eldest of the three; a noble character, living only for duty and affection. When the ear heard her, then

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Ward has given evidence of this impartiality in her *Dedication to the memory of two friends*, of whom one, Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton, lived and died unshaken in belief. The other is more or less made known in the pages of the work

it blessed her; and when the eye saw her, it gave witness to her.<sup>3</sup> Here comes upon the scene Robert Elsmere, the eponymist and hero of the book, and the ideal, almost the idol, of the authoress.

He had been brought up at Oxford, in years when the wholesale discomfiture of the great religious movement in the University, which followed upon the secession of Cardinal Newman, had been in its turn succeeded by a new religious reaction. The youth had been open to the personal influences of a tutor, who is in the highest degree beautiful, classical, and indifferentist; and of a noble-minded rationalising teacher, whose name, Mr. Grey, is the thin disguise of another name, and whose lofty character, together with his gifts, and with the tendencies of the time, had made him a power in Oxford. But, in its action on a nature of devout susceptibilities as well as active talents, the place is stronger than the man, and Robert casts in his lot with the ministry of the Church. Let us stop at this point to notice the terms used. At St. Mary's 'the sight and the experience touched his inmost feeling, and satisfied all the poetical and dramatic instincts of a passionate nature.'<sup>4</sup> He 'carried his religious passion . . . into the service of the great positive tradition around him.' This great, and commonly life-governing decision, is taken under the influence of forces wholly emotional. It is first after the step taken that we have an inkling of any reason for it.<sup>5</sup> This is not an isolated phenomenon. It is a key to the entire action. The work may be summed up in this way: it represents a battle between intellect and emotion. Of right, intellect wins; and, having won, enlists emotion in its service.

Elsmere breaks upon us in Westmoreland, prepared to make the great commission the business of his life, and to spend and be spent in it to the uttermost. He is at once attracted by Catherine; attention forthwith ripens into love; and love finds expression in a proposal. But, with a less educated intelligence, the girl has a purpose of life not less determined than the youth. She believes herself to have an outdoor vocation in the glen, and above all an indoor vocation in her family, of which she is the single prop. A long battle of love ensues, fought out with not less ability, and with even greater tenacity, than the remarkable conflict of intellects, carried on by correspondence, which ended in the marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle. The resolute tension of the two minds has many phases; and a double crisis, first of refusal, secondly of acceptance. This part of the narrative, wrought out in detail with singular skill, will probably be deemed the most successful, the most normal, of the whole. It is thoroughly noble on both sides. The final surrender of Catherine is in truth an opening of the eyes to a wider view of the evolution of the individual, and of the great vocation of life; and it

<sup>3</sup> See Job xxix. 11.

<sup>4</sup> i. 121, 123.

<sup>5</sup> i. 128.

involves no disparagement. The garrison evacuates the citadel, but its arms have not been laid down, and its colours are flying still.

So the pair settle themselves in a family living, full of the enthusiasm of humanity, which is developed with high energy in every practical detail, and based upon the following of the Incarnate Saviour. Equipped thus far with all that renders life desirable, their union is blessed by the birth of a daughter, and everything thrives around them for the formation of an ideal parish.

But the parish is adorned by a noble old English mansion, and the mansion inhabited by a wealthy Squire, who knows little of duty, but is devoted to incessant study. As an impersonated intellect, he is abreast of all modern inquiry, and, a 'Tractarian' in his youth, he has long abandoned all belief. At the outset, he resents profoundly the Rector's obtrusive concern for his neglected tenantry. But the courage of the clergyman is not to be damped by isolation, and in the case of a scandalously insanitary hamlet, after an adequate number of deaths, Mr. Wendover puts aside the screen called his agent, and rebuilds with an ample generosity. This sudden and complete surrender seems to be introduced to glorify the hero of the work, for it does not indicate any permanent change in the social ideas of Mr. Wendover, but only in his relations to his clergyman.

There is, however, made ready for him a superlative revenge. Robert has enjoyed the use of his rich library, and the two hold literary communications, but with a compact of silence on matters of belief. This treaty is honourably observed by the Squire. But the clergyman invites his fate.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Wendover makes known to him a great design for a 'History of Testimony,'<sup>7</sup> worked out through many centuries. The book speaks indeed of 'the long wrestle' of the two men, and the like.<sup>8</sup> But of Elsmere's wrestling there is no other trace or sign. What weapons the Rector wielded for his faith, what strokes he struck, has not even in a single line been recorded. The discourse of the Squire points out that theologians are men who decline to examine evidence, that miracles are the invention of credulous ages; that the preconceptions sufficiently explain the results. He wins in a canter. There cannot surely be a more curious contrast than that between the real battle, fought in a hundred rounds, between Elsmere and Catherine on marriage, and the fictitious battle between Elsmere and the Squire on the subject of religion, where the one side is a pæan, and the other a blank. A great creed, with the testimony of eighteen centuries at its back, cannot find an articulate word to say in its defence, and the downfall of the scheme of belief shatters also, and of right, the highly ordered scheme of life that had nestled in the Rectory of Murewell, as it still does in thousands of other English parsonages.

It is notable that Elsmere seeks, in this conflict with the Squire,

<sup>6</sup> ii. 243.

<sup>7</sup> ii. 240.

<sup>8</sup> ii. 244, 245.

no aid or counsel whatever. He encounters indeed by chance Mr. Newcome, a Ritualistic clergyman, whom the generous sympathies of the authoress place upon the roll of his friends. But the language of Mr. Newcome offers no help to his understanding. It is this:—

Trample on yourself. Pray down the demon, fast, scourge, kill the body, that the soul may live. What are we miserable worms, that we should defy the Mos High, that we should set our wretched faculties against His Omnipotence? <sup>9</sup>

Mr. Newcome appears everywhere as not only a respectable but a remarkable character. But as to what he says here, how much does it amount to? Considered as a medicine for a mind diseased, for an unsettled, dislocated soul, is it less or more than pure nonsense? In the work of an insidious non-believer, it would be set down as part of his fraud. Mrs. Ward evidently gives it in absolute good faith. It is one in a series of indications, by which this gifted authoress conveys to us what appears to be her thoroughly genuine belief that historical Christianity has, indeed, broad grounds and deep roots in emotion; but in reason none whatever.

The revelation to the wife is terrible; but Catherine clings to her religion on a basis essentially akin to that of Newcome; and the faith of these eighteen centuries, and of the prime countries of the world,

Bella, immortal, benefica  
Fede, ai trionfi avvezza,<sup>10</sup>

is dismissed without a hearing.

For my own part, I humbly retort on Robert Elsmere. Considered intellectually, his proceedings in regard to belief appear to me, from the beginning as well as in the downward process, to present dismal gaps. But the emotional part of his character is complete, nay redundant. There is no moral weakness or hesitation. There rises up before him the noble maxim, assigned to the so-called Mr. Grey (with whom he has a consultation of foregone conclusions), ‘Conviction is the conscience of the mind.’

He renounces his parish and his orders. He still believes in God, and accepts the historical Christ as a wonderful man, good among the good, but a *primus inter pares*. Passing through a variety of stages, he devotes himself to the religion of humanity; reconciles to the new gospel, by shoals, skilled artisans of London who had been totally inaccessible to the old one; and nobly kills himself with overwork, passing away in a final flood of light. He founds and leaves behind him the ‘New Christian Brotherhood’ of Elgood Street; and we are at the close apprised, with enthusiastic sincerity, that this is the true effort of the race,<sup>11</sup> and

Others I doubt not, if not we,  
The issue of our toils shall see.

<sup>9</sup> ii 270.

<sup>10</sup> Manzoni’s *Clinque Maggio*.

<sup>11</sup> iii. 411; comp. 276.

Who can grudge to this absolutely pure-minded and very distinguished writer the comfort of having at last found the true specific for the evils and miseries of the world? None surely who bear in mind that the Salvation Army has been known to proclaim itself the Church of the future, or who happen to know that Bunsen, when in 1841 he had procured the foundation of the bishopric of Jerusalem, suggested in private correspondence his hope that this might be the Church which would meet the glorified Redeemer at His coming.

It is necessary here to revert to the Squire. Himself the *μοῖρα* *πέπρωμένη*, the supreme arbiter of destinies in the book, he is somewhat unkindly treated; his mind at length gives way, and a darkling veil is drawn over the close. Here seems to be a little literary intolerance, something even savouring of a religious test. Robert Elsmere stopped in the downward slide at theism, and it calms and glorifies his deathbed. But the Squire had not stopped there. He had said to Elsmere,<sup>12</sup> 'You are playing into the hands of the Blacks. All this theistic philosophy of yours only means so much grist to their mill in the end.' But the great guide is dismissed from his guiding office as summarily as all other processes are conducted, which are required by the purpose of the writer. Art everywhere gives way to purpose. Elsmere no more shows cause for his theism than he had shown it against his Christianity. Why was not Mr. Wendover allowed at least the consolation which gave a satisfaction to David Hume?

Not yet, however, may I wholly part from this sketch of the work. It is so large that much must be omitted. But there is one limb of the plan which is peculiar. Of the two sisters not yet named, one, Agnes by name, appears only as quasi-chaperon or as 'dummie.' But Rose, the third, has beauty, the gift of a musical artist, and quick and plastic social faculties. Long and elaborate love relations are developed between her and the *poco-curante* tutor and friend, Mr. Langham. Twice she is fairly embarked in passion for him, and twice he jilts her. Still she is not discouraged, and she finally marries a certain Flaxman, an amiable but somewhat manufactured character. From the standing point of art, can this portion of the book fail to stir much misgiving? We know from Shakespeare how the loves of two sisters can be comprised within a single play. But while the drama requires only one connected action, the novel, and eminently this novel, aims rather at the exhibition of a life: and the reader of these volumes may be apt to say that in working two such lives, as those of Catherine and Rose, through so many stages, the authoress has departed from previous example, and has loaded her ship, though a gallant one, with more cargo than it will bear.

It may indeed be that Mrs. Ward has been led to charge her tale with such a weight of matter from a desire to give philosophical completeness to her representation of the main springs of action which

mark the life of the period. For in Robert Elsmere we have the tempered but aggressive action of the sceptical intellect; in Catherine the strong reaction against it; in Rose the art-life; and in Langham the literary and cultivated indifference of the time. The comprehensiveness of such a picture may be admitted, without withdrawing the objection that, as a practical result, the cargo is too heavy for the vessel.

Apart from this question, is it possible to pass without a protest the double jilt? Was Rose, with her quick and self-centred life, a well-chosen *corpus vile* upon whom to pass this experiment? More broadly, though credible perhaps for a man, is such a process in any case possible by the laws of art for a woman? Does she not violate the first conditions of her nature in exposing herself to so piercing an insult? An enhancement of delicate self-respect is one among the compensations, which Providence has supplied in woman, to make up for a deficiency in some ruder kinds of strength.

Again, I appeal to the laws of art against the final disposal of Catherine. Having much less of ability than her husband, she is really drawn with greater force and truth; and possesses so firm a fibre that when, having been bred in a school of some intolerance, she begins to blunt the edge of her resistance, and to tolerate in divers ways, without adopting, the denuded system of her husband, we begin to feel that the key-note of her character is being tempered with. After his death, the discords become egregious. She remains, as she supposes, orthodox and tenaciously Evangelical. But every knee must be made to bow to Elsmere. So she does not return to the northern valley and her mother's declining age, but in London devotes her week-days to carrying on the institutions of charity he had founded on behalf of his new religion. He had himself indignantly remonstrated with some supposed clergyman, who, in the guise of a Broad Churchman, at once held Elsmere's creed and discharged externally the office of an Anglican priest. He therefore certainly is not responsible for having taught her to believe the chasm between them was a narrow one. Yet she leaps or steps across it every Sunday, attending her church in the forenoon, and looming as regularly every afternoon in the temple of the New Brotherhood. Here surely the claims of system have marred the work of art. Characters might have been devised whom this see-saw would have suited well enough; but for the Catherine of the first volume it is an unmitigated solecism; a dismal, if not even a degrading compromise.

It has been observed that the women of the book are generally drawn with more felicity than the men. As a work of art, Rose is in my view the most successful of the women, and among the men the Squire. With the Squire Mrs. Ward is not in sympathy, for he destroys too much, and he does nothing but destroy. She cannot be in sympathy with Rose; for Rose, who is selfishly and heartlessly used, is herself selfish and heartless; with this aggravation, that she

has grown up in immediate contact with a noble elder sister, and yet has not caught a particle of nobleness, as well as in view of an infirm mother to whom she scarcely gives a care. On the other hand, in her Robert, who has all Mrs. Ward's affection and almost her worship and who is clothed with a perfect panoply of high qualities, she appears to be less successful and more artificial. In the recently published correspondence<sup>13</sup> of Sir Henry Taylor, who was by no means given to paradox, we are told that great earnestness of purpose and strong adhesive sympathies in an author are adverse to the freedom and independence of treatment, the disembarassed movement of the creative hand, which are required in the supreme poetic office of projecting character on the canvas. If there be truth in this novel and interesting suggestion, we cannot wonder at finding the result exhibited in *Robert Elsmere*, for never was a book written with greater persistency and intensity of purpose. Every page of its principal narrative is adapted and addressed by Mrs. Ward to the final aim which is bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. This aim is to expel the preternatural element from Christianity, to destroy its dogmatic structure, yet to keep intact the moral and spiritual results. The Brotherhood presented to us with such sanguine hopefulness is a 'Christian' brotherhood, but with a Christianity emptied of that which Christians believe to be the soul and springhead of its life. For Christianity, in the established Christian sense, is the presentation to us not of abstract dogmas for acceptance, but of a living and a Divine Person, to whom they are to be united by a vital incorporation. It is the reunion to God of a nature severed from God by sin, and the process is one, not of teaching lessons, but of imparting a new life, with its ordained equipment of gifts and powers.

It is I apprehend a complete mistake to suppose, as appears to be the supposition of this remarkable book, that all which has to be done with Scripture, in order to effect the desired transformation of religion, is to eliminate from it the miraculous element. Tremendous as is the sweeping process which extrudes the Resurrection, there is much else, which is in no sense miraculous, to extrude along with it. The Procession of Palms, for example, is indeed profoundly significant, but it is in no way miraculous. Yet, in any consistent history of a Robert Elsmere's Christ, there could be no Procession of Palms. Unless it be the healing of the ear of Malchus, there is not a miraculous event between the commencement of the Passion and the Crucifixion itself. Yet the notes of a superhuman majesty overspread the whole. We talk of all religions as essentially one; but what religion presents to its votaries such a tale as this? Bishop Temple, in his sermons at Rugby, has been among the later teachers who have shown how the whole behaviour of our Lord, in this extremity of His abasement, seems more than ever to transcend all human limits, and to exhibit



without arguing His Divinity. The parables, again, are not less refractory than the miracles, and must disappear along with them: for what parables are there which are not built upon the idea of His unique and transcendent office? The Gospel of Saint John has much less of miracle than the Synoptics; but it must of course descend from its pedestal, in all that is most its own. And what is gained by all this condemnation, until we get rid of the Baptismal formula? It is a question not of excision from the gospels, but of tearing them into shreds. Far be it from me to deny that the parts which remain, or which remain legible, are vital parts; but this is no more than to say that there may remain vital organs of a man, after the man himself has been cut in pieces.

I have neither space nor capacity at command for the adequate discussion of the questions, which shattered the faith of Robert Elsmere: whether miracles can happen, and whether 'an universal pre-conception' in their favour at the birth of Christianity 'governing the work of all men of all schools,'<sup>14</sup> adequately accounts for the place which has been given to them in the New Testament, as available proofs of the Divine Mission of our Lord. But I demur on all the points to the authority of the Squire, and even of Mr. Grey.

The impossibility of miracle is a doctrine which appears to claim for its basis the results of physical inquiry. They point to unbroken sequences in material nature, and refer every phenomenon to its immediate antecedent as adequate to its orderly production. But the appeal to these great achievements of our time is itself disorderly, for it calls upon natural science to decide a question which lies beyond its precinct. There is an extraneous force of will which acts upon matter in derogation of laws purely physical, or alters the balance of these laws among themselves. It can be neither philosophical nor scientific to proclaim the impossibility of miracle, until philosophy or science shall have determined a limit, beyond which this extraneous force of will, so familiar to our experience, cannot act upon or deflect the natural order.

Next, as to that avidity for miracle, which is supposed by the omniscient Squire to account for the invention of it. Let it be granted, for argument's sake, that if the Gospel had been intended only for the Jews, they at least were open to the imputation of a biassing and blinding appetite for signs and wonders. But scarcely had the Christian scheme been established among the Jews, when it began to take root among the Gentiles. It will hardly be contended that these Gentiles, who detested and despised the Jewish race, had any predisposition to receive a religion at their hands or upon their authority. Were they then, during the century which succeeded our Lord's birth, so swayed by a devouring thirst for the supernatural as to account for the early reception, and the steady if not rapid

<sup>14</sup> ii. 246, 247.

growth, of the Christian creed among them? The statement of the Squire, which carries Robert Elsmere, is that the preconception in favour of miracles at the period 'governed the work of all men of all schools.'<sup>15</sup> A most gross and palpable exaggeration. In philosophy the Epicurean school was atheistic, the Stoic school was ambiguously theistic, and doubt nestled in the Academy. Christianity had little direct contact with these schools, but they acted on the tone of thought, in a manner not favourable but adverse to the preconception.

Meantime the power of religion was in decay. The springs of it in the general mind and heart were weakened. A deluge of profligacy had gone far to destroy, at Rome, even the external habit of public worship; and Horace, himself an indifferentist,<sup>16</sup> denounces the neglect and squalor of the temples; while further on we have the stern and emphatic testimony of Juvenal:—

Esse aliquid Manes, et subterranea regna,  
Et contum, et Stygio ranas in gurgite nigras,  
Nec pueri credunt, nisi qui nondum ære lavantur.<sup>17</sup>

The age was not an age of faith, among thinking and ruling classes, either in natural or in supernatural religion. There had been indeed a wonderful 'evangelical preparation' in the sway of the Greek language, in the unifying power of the Roman State and Empire, and in the utter moral failure of the grand and dominant civilisations; but not in any virgin soil, yearning for the sun, the rain, or the seed of truth.

But the Squire, treading in the footprints of Gibbon's fifteenth Chapter, leaves it to be understood that, in the appeal to the supernatural, the new religion enjoyed an exclusive as well as an overpowering advantage; that it had a patent for miracle, which none could infringe. Surely this is an error even more gross than the statement already cited about all men of all schools. The supernatural was interwoven with the entire fabric of the religion of the Roman State, which, if weak and effete as a religious discipline, was of extraordinary power as a social institution. It stood, if not on faith yet on nationality, on tradition, on rich endowments, on the deeply interested attachment of a powerful aristocracy, and on that policy of wide conciliation, which gave to so many creeds, less exclusive than the Christian, a cause common with its own.

Looking for a comprehensive description of miracles, we might say that they constitute a language of heaven embodied in material signs, by which communication is established between the Deity and man, outside the daily course of nature and experience. Distinctions may be taken between one kind of miracle and another. But none of these are distinctions in principle. Sometimes they are alleged to be the offspring of a divine power committed to the hands of particular men; sometimes they are simple manifestations unconnected

<sup>15</sup> ii. 247.<sup>16</sup> Hor. *Od.* i. 34; iii. 6.<sup>17</sup> *Sat.* ii. 150.

with human agency, and carrying with them their own meaning, such as the healings in Bethesda; sometimes they are a system of events and of phenomena subject to authoritative and privileged interpretation. Miracle, portent, prodigy and sign are all various forms of one and the same thing, namely an invasion of the known and common natural order from the side of the supernatural. In the last-named case, there is an expression of the authorised human judgment upon it, while in the earlier ones there is only a special appeal to it. They rest upon one and the same basis. We may assign to miracle a body and a soul. It has for its body something accepted as being either in itself or in its incidents outside the known processes of ordinary nature, and for its soul the alleged message which in one shape or another it helps to convey from the Deity to man. This supernatural element, as such, was at least as familiar to the Roman heathenism, as to the Christian scheme. It was indeed more highly organised. It was embodied in the regular and normal practice of the ministers of religion, and especially, under the jurisdiction of the pontifical college, it was the regular and standing business of the augurs to observe, report, and interpret the supernatural signs, by which the gods gave reputed instructions to men outside the course of nature. Sometimes it was by strange atmospheric phenomena; sometimes by physical prodigies, as when a woman produced a snake,<sup>18</sup> or a calf was born with its head in its thigh;<sup>19</sup> whereupon, says Tacitus, *secuta haruspicum interpretatio*. Sometimes through events only preternatural from the want of assignable cause, as when the statue of Julius Cæsar, on an island in the Tiber, turned itself round from west to east.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes with an approximation to the Christian signs and wonders, as when Vespasian removed with spittle the *tabes oculorum*, and restored the impotent hand.<sup>21</sup> It does not readily appear why in principle the Romans, who had the supernatural for their daily food in a shape sustained by the unbroken tradition of their country, should be violently attracted by the mere exhibition of it from a despised source, and in a manner less formal, less organised, and less known. In one important way we know the accepted supernatural of the Romans operated with direct and telling power against the Gospel. *Si cælum stetit, si terra movit, Christianos ad leones.*<sup>22</sup> Or, in the unsuspected language of Tacitus, *dum latius metuitur, trepidatione vulgi, invalidus quisque obtriti*. When the portents were unfavourable, and there was fear of their extension, the weak had to suffer from the popular alarms.<sup>23</sup>

The upshot of the matter then appears to be something like this.

The lowly and despised preachers of Christian portent were confronted everywhere by the highborn and accomplished caste sworn to the service of the gods, familiar from centuries of tradition with the

<sup>18</sup> Tac. *Ann.* xiv. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* xv. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Tac. *Hist.* i. 86,

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 81.

<sup>22</sup> Tertull. *Apol.* 40.

<sup>23</sup> Tac. *Ann.* xii. 34.

supernatural, and supported at every point with the whole force and influence of civil authority. Nor has there ever probably been a case of a contest so unequal, as far as the powers of this world are concerned. Tainted in its origin by its connection with the detested Judaism, odious to the prevailing tone by its exclusiveness, it rested originally upon the testimony of men few, poor and ignorant, and for a length of time no human genius was enlisted in its service, with the single exception of Saint Paul. All that we of this nineteenth century know, and know so well, under the name of vested interests, is insignificant compared with the embattled fortress that these humble Christians had to storm. And the Squire, if he is to win the day with minds less ripe for conversion than Robert Elsmere, must produce some other suit of weapons from his armory.

With him I now part company, as his thoroughgoing negation parts company with the hybrid scheme of Mrs. Ward. It is of that scheme that I now desire to take a view immediately practical.

In a concise but striking notice in the *Times*<sup>23</sup> it is placed in the category of 'clever attacks upon revealed religion.' It certainly offers us a substitute for revealed religion; and possibly the thought of the book might be indicated in these words: 'The Christianity accepted in England is a good thing; but come with me, and I will show you a better.'

It may, I think, be fairly described as a devout attempt, made in good faith, to simplify the difficult mission of religion in the world by discarding the supposed lumber of the Christian theology, while retaining and applying, in their undiminished breadth of scope, the whole personal, social, and spiritual morality which has now, as matter of fact, entered into the patrimony of Christendom; and, since Christendom is the dominant power of the world, into the patrimony of the race. It is impossible indeed to conceive a more religious life than the later life of Robert Elsmere, in his sense of the word religion. And that sense is far above the sense in which religion is held, or practically applied, by great multitudes of Christians. It is, however, a new form of religion. The question is, can it be actually and beneficially substituted for the old one. It abolishes of course the whole authority of Scripture. It abolishes also Church, priesthood or ministry, sacraments, and the whole established machinery which trains the Christian as a member of a religious society. These have been regarded by fifty generations of men as wings of the soul. It is still required by Mrs. Ward to fly, and to fly as high as ever; but it is to fly without wings. For baptism, we have a badge of silver, and inscription in a book.<sup>24</sup> For the Eucharist there is at an ordinary meal a recital of the fragment, 'This do in remembrance of Me.' The children responded, 'Jesus, we remember thee always.' It is hard to say that prayer is retained. In the Elgood Street service 'it is rather

<sup>23</sup> *Times*, April 7, 1888.

<sup>24</sup> iii. 358.

an act of adoration and faith, than a prayer properly so called,'<sup>25</sup> and it appears that memory and trust are the instruments on which the individual is to depend, for maintaining his communion with God. It would be curious to know how the New Brotherhood is to deal with the great mystery of marriage, perhaps the truest touchstone of religious revolution.

It must be obvious to every reader that in the great duel between the old faith and the new, as it is fought in *Robert Elsmere*, there is a great inequality in the distribution of the arms. Reasoning is the weapon of the new scheme; emotion the sole resource of the old. Neither Catherine nor Newcome have a word to say beyond the expression of feeling; and it is when he has adopted the negative side that the hero himself is fully introduced to the faculty of argument. This is a singular arrangement, especially in the case of a writer who takes a generous view of the Christianity that she only desires to supplant by an improved device. The explanation may be simple. There are abundant signs in the book that the negative speculatists have been consulted if not ransacked; but there is nowhere a sign that the authoress has made herself acquainted with the Christian apologists, old or recent; or has weighed the evidences derivable from the Christian history; or has taken measure of the relation in which the doctrines of grace have historically stood to the production of the noblest, purest, and greatest characters of the Christian ages. If such be the case, she has skipped lightly (to put it no higher) over vast mental spaces of literature and learning relevant to the case, and has given sentence in the cause without hearing the evidence.

It might perhaps be not unjust to make a retort upon the authoress, and say that while she believes herself simply to be yielding obedience to reason, her movement is in reality impelled by bias. We have been born into an age when, in the circles of literature and science, there is a strong antidogmatic leaning, a prejudice which may largely intercept the action of judgment. Partly because belief has its superstitions, and the detection of these superstitions opens the fabric to attack, like a breach in the wall of a fortress when at a given point it has been stuffed with unsound material. Partly because the rapidity of the movement of the time predisposes the mind to novelty. Partly because the multiplication of enjoyments, through the progress of commerce and invention, enhances the materialism of life, strengthens by the forces of habit the hold of the seen world upon us, and leaves less both of brain power and of heart power available for the unseen. Enormous accretion of wealth is no more deprived of its sting now, than it was when Saint Paul penned his profoundly penetrating admonition to Timothy.<sup>26</sup> And when, under the present conditions, it happens that the environment of personal association

<sup>25</sup> iii. 360.<sup>26</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 9.

represents either concentrated hostility or hopeless diversity in religion, there may be hardly a chance for firm and measured belief. What we find to be troublesome, yet from some inward protest are not prepared wholly to reject, we like to simplify and reduce; and the instances of good and devoted men who are adverse to dogma, more frequent than usual in this age, are powerful to persuade us that in lightening the cargo we are really securing the safe voyage of the ship. 'About dogma we hear dispute, but the laws of high social morality no speculation is disposed to question. Why not get rid of the disputable, and concentrate all our strength on grasping the undisputed?' We may by a little wresting quote high authority for this recommendation. 'Whereto we have already attained . . . let us mind the same thing. . . . And if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.' <sup>27</sup> It is not difficult to conceive how, under the action of causes with which the time abounds, pure and lofty minds, wholly guiltless of the intention to impair or lower the motive forces of Christianity, may be led into the snare, and may even conceive a process in itself destructive to be, on the contrary, conservative and reparatory.

But it is a snare none the less. And first let us recollect, when we speak of renouncing Christian dogma, what it is that we mean. The germ of it as a system lies in the formula, 'Baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' <sup>28</sup> This was speedily developed into the substance of the Apostles' Creed: the Creed which forms our confession of individual faith, in baptism and on the bed of death. Now belief in God, which forms (so to speak) the first great limb of the Creed, is strictly a dogma, and is on no account, according to Mrs. Ward, to be surrendered. But the second and greatest portion of the Creed contains twelve propositions, of which nine are matters of fact, and the whole twelve have for their office the setting forth to us of a Personage, to whom a great dispensation has been committed. The third division of the Creed is more dogmatic, but it is bound down like the second to earth and fact by the article of the Church, a visible and palpable institution. The principal purely dogmatic part of this great document is the part which is to be retained. And we, who accept the Christian story, are entitled to say, that to extrude from a history, tied to strictly human facts, that by which they become a standing channel of organic connection between Deity and humanity, is not presumptively a very hopeful mode of strengthening our belief in God, thus deprived of its props and accessories. The chasm between Deity and the human soul, over which the scheme of Redemption has thrown a bridge, again yawns beneath our feet, in all its breadth and depth.

Although the Divinity of Christ is not put prominently forward in this book, but rather the broader objection to supernatural mani-

<sup>27</sup> Phil. iii. 15, 16.

<sup>28</sup> St. Matt. xxviii. 19.

festations, yet it will be found to be the real hinge of the entire question. For, if Christ be truly God, few will deny that the exceptional incidents, which follow in the train of His appearance upon earth, raise, in substance, no new difficulty. Is it true, then, that Christians have been so divided on this subject as to promise us a return of peace and progress by its elimination?

To answer this question rightly, we must not take the humour of this or that particular time or country, but must regard the Christian system in its whole extension, and its whole duration. So regarding it, we shall find that the assertion, far from being true, is glaringly untrue. The truth in rude outline is surely this. That when the Gospel went out into the world, the greatest of all the groups of controversies, which progressively arose within its borders, was that which concerned the true nature of the Object of worship. That these controversies ran through the most important shapes, which have been known to the professing Church of later years, and through many more. That they rose, especially in the fourth century, to such a height, amidst the conflict of councils, popes, and theologians, that the private Christian was too often like the dove wandering over the waters, and seeking in vain a resting place for the sole of his foot. That the whole mind and heart of the Church were given, in their whole strength and through a lengthened period, to find some solution of these controversies. That many generations passed before Arianism wholly ceased to be the basis of Christian profession in spots or sections of Christendom, but not so long before the central thought of the body as a whole had come to be fixed in the form of what has ever since, and now for over fourteen hundred years, been known as the orthodox belief. The authority of this tradition, based upon the Scriptures, has through all that period been upheld at the highest point to which a marvellous continuity and universality could raise it. It was not impeached by the questioning mind of the thirteenth century. The scientific revolution, which opened to us the antipodes and the solar system, did not shake it. The more subtle dangers of the Renaissance were dangers to Christianity as a whole, but not to this great element of Christianity as a part. And when the terrible struggles of the Reformation stirred every course human passion as well as every fond religious interest into fury, even then the Nicene belief, as Möhler in his *Symbolik* has so well observed, sat undisturbed in a region elevated above the controversies of the time; which only touched it at points so exceptional, and comparatively so obscure, as not appreciably to qualify its majestic authority. A Christianity without Christ is no Christianity; and a Christ not divine is one other than the Christ on whom the souls of Christians have habitually fed. What virtue, what piety, have existed outside of Christianity, is a question totally distinct. But to hold that, since the great controversy of the early time was wound up at Chalcedon,

the question of our Lord's Divinity (which draws after it all that Robert Elsmere would excide), has generated the storms of the Christian atmosphere, would be simply an historical untruth. How then is the work of peace to be promoted by the excision from our creed of that central truth on which we are generally agreed?

The onward movement of negation in the present day has presented perhaps no more instructive feature than this, that the Unitarian persuasion has, in this country at least, by no means thriven upon it. It might have been thought that, in the process of dilapidation, here would have been a point at which the receding tide of belief would have rested at any rate for a while. But instead of this, we are informed that the number of professed Unitarians have increased less than those of other communions, and less than the natural growth of the population. And we find Mrs. Ward herself describing the old Unitarian scheme<sup>29</sup> as one wholly destitute of logic; but in what respect she improves upon it I have not yet perceived.

In order to invest any particular propagandism with a show of presumptive title to our acceptance, its author should be able to refer it to some standard of appeal which will show that it has foundations otherwise than in mere private judgment or active imagination. The books of the New Testament I understand to be, for Mrs. Ward, of no value except for the moral precepts they contain. Still less may we invoke the authority of the Old Testament, where the ethical picture is more chequered. She finds no spell in the great moral miracle (so to phrase it) of the Psalms; nor in the marvellous *propaideia* of the Jewish history, so strikingly confirmed by recent research; in the Levitical law, the prophetic teaching, the entire dispensation of temporal promise and of religious worship and instruction, by which the Hebrew race was kept in social isolation through fifteen centuries, as a cradle for the Redeemer that was to come. She is not awakened by the Christian more than by the Jewish history. No way to her assent is opened by the great victory of the world's babes and striplings over its philosophers and scholars, and the serried array of emperors, aristocracies, and statesmen, with their elaborate apparatus of organised institutions. All this cogent mass of human testimony is rendered, I admit, on behalf not of a vague and arbitrary severance of Christian morals from the roots which have produced them, but of what we term the Christian dogma, that is to say, of belief in God supplemented and brought home by the great fact of Redemption, and of the provision made through the Church of Christ for the perpetual conversation and application of its living powers.

And it must be observed that, in adducing this evidence from consent, I make no assumption and beg no question as between reformed and unreformed Christianity. By any such preferential



treatment of a part, I should weaken the authority and betray the sacred cause of the whole. All that can be said or shown of the corruptions that have gathered round the central scheme, of the failure rightly to divide the word of truth, of the sin and shame that in a hundred forms have belied its profession, affords only new proof of the imperishable vitality that has borne so much disease, of the buoyancy of the ark on whose hull has grown so much of excrescence without arresting its course through the waters. And again, the concord of Christians ever since the great adjudication of the fifth century on the central truth has acquired an addition of weight almost incalculable, from the fact that they have differed so sharply upon many of the propositions that are grouped around it.

Without doubt human testimony is to be duly and strictly sifted, and every defect in its quantity or quality is to be recorded in the shape of a deduction from its weight. But as there is no proceeding more irreverent, so there is none more strictly irrational, than is wholesale depreciation. Such depreciation is an infallible note to shallow and careless thinking, for it very generally implies an exaggerated and almost ludicrous estimate of the capacity and performances of the present generation, as compared with those which have preceded it. Judges in our own cause, pleaders with nobody to reply, we take ample note of every comparative advantage we possess but forget to register deteriorating and disqualifying influences. Not less commonly is our offence avenged by our own inconsistency. The solemn voice of the ages, the *securus judicat orbis terrarum*, amounts simply to zero for Robert Elsmere. Yet he can absolutely surrender to his own selected pope the guidance of his understanding; and when he asks himself, at the funeral in the third volume, whether the more modest, that is the emasculated, form of human hope in the presence of the Eternal, may not be 'as real, as sustaining,' as the old one, his reply to this great question is—'Let Grey's trust answer for me.'<sup>30</sup>

This great buttress of the old religion, whatever its value, is then withdrawn from the new one, which starts like

a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean,

accredited by a successful venture among the London artisans, who differ (so we are told) not only from the classes above and beneath them in the metropolis, as to their disposition to accept the Christian doctrines, but from their own brethren in the north.<sup>31</sup> It is not, therefore, on testimony that the Elsmere gospel takes its stand. Does it, then, stand upon philosophy, upon inherent beauty and fitness, as compared with the scheme which it dismembers and then professes to replace? Again, be it borne in mind that the essence of

<sup>30</sup> iii. 284.

<sup>31</sup> iii. 159.

the proposal is to banish the supernatural idea and character of our Lord, but to imbibe and assimilate His moral teachings.

From my antiquated point of view, this is simply to bark the tree, and then, as the death which ensues is not immediate, to point out with satisfaction on the instant that it still waves living branches in the wind. We have before us a huge larcenous appropriation, by the modern schemes, of goods which do not belong to them. They carry peacocks' feathers, which adorn them for a time, and which they cannot reproduce. Let us endeavour to learn whether these broad assumptions, which flow out of the historic testimony of the Christian ages, are also prompted and sustained by the reason of the case.

It is sometimes possible to trace peculiar and marked types of human character with considerable precision to their causes. Take, for instance, the Spartan type of character, in its relation to the legislation attributed to Lysurgus. Or take, again, the Jewish type, such as it is presented to us both by the ancient and the later history, in its relation to the Mosaic law and institutions. It would surely have been a violent paradox, in either of these cases, to propose the abolition of the law, and to assert at the same time that the character would continue to be exhibited, not only sporadically and for a time, but normally and in permanence.

These were restricted, almost tribal, systems. Christianity, though by no means less peculiar, was diffusive. It both produced a type of character wholly new to the Roman world, and it fundamentally altered the laws and institutions, the tone, temper, and tradition of that world. For example, it changed profoundly the relation of the poor to the rich, and the almost forgotten obligations of the rich to the poor. It abolished slavery, abolished human sacrifice, abolished gladiatorial shows, and a multitude of other horrors. It restored the position of woman in society. It proscribed polygamy; and put down divorce, absolutely in the West, though not absolutely in the East. It made peace, instead of war, the normal and presumed relation between human societies. It exhibited life as a discipline everywhere and in all its parts, and changed essentially the place and function of suffering in human experience. Accepting the ancient morality as far as it went, it not only enlarged but transfigured its teaching, by the laws of humility and of forgiveness, and by a law of purity perhaps even more new and strange than these. Let it be understood that I speak throughout not of such older religion as may have subsisted in the lowly and unobserved places of human life, but of what stamped the character of its strongholds; of the elements which made up the main and central currents of thought, action, and influence, in those places, and in those classes, which drew the rest of the world in their train. All this was not the work of a day, but it was the work of powers and principles which persistently asserted themselves in despite of controversy, of infirmity, and of corruption

in every form ; which reconstituted in life and vigour a society found in decadence ; which by degrees came to pervade the very air we breathe ; and which eventually have beyond all dispute made Christendom the dominant portion, and Christianity the ruling power, of the world. And all this has been done, not by eclectic and arbitrary fancies, but by the creed of the Homoousion, in which the philosophy of modern times sometimes appears to find a favourite theme of ridicule. But it is not less material to observe that the whole fabric, social as well as personal, rests on the new type of individual character which the Gospel brought into life and action : enriched and completed without doubt from collateral sources which made part of the 'Evangelical preparation,' but in its central essence due entirely to the dispensation, which had been founded and wrought out in the land of Judea, and in the history of the Hebrew race. What right have we to detach, or to suppose we can detach, this type of personal character from the causes out of which as matter of history it has grown, and to assume that without its roots it will thrive as well as with them ?

For Mrs. Ward is so firmly convinced, and so affectionately sensible, of the exquisite excellence of the Christian type that she will permit no abatement from it, though she thinks it can be cast in a mould which is human as well as, nay, better than, in one which is divine. Nor is she the first person who, in renouncing the Christian tradition, has reserved her allegiance to Christian morals and even sought to raise their standard. We have, for instance, in America not a person only, but a society, which, while trampling on the Divinity and Incarnation of Christ, not only accepts His rule of life, but pushes evangelical counsels into absolute precepts, and insists upon them as the rule of life for all who seek, instead of abiding in the 'lower floor churches,' to be Christians indeed. 'The fundamental principles of Shakerism' are 'virgin purity, non-resistance, peace, equality of inheritance, and unspottedness from the world.'<sup>32</sup> The evidence of travellers appears to show that the ideal of these projectors has to a certain degree been realised ; nor can we know for how many years an eccentric movement of this kind will endure the test of time without palpably giving way. The power of environment, and the range of idiosyncrasy, suffice to generate, especially in dislocating times, all sorts of abnormal combinations, which subsists in a large degree, upon forces not their own, and so impose themselves, with a show of authority, upon the world.

Let us return to the point. The Christian type is the product and the property of the Christian scheme. No, says the objector, the improvements which we witness are the offspring of civilisation. It might be a sufficient answer to point out that the civilisation before

<sup>32</sup> The quotation is from a preface to *Shaker Sermons*, by H. L. Eads, Bishop of South Union, Kentucky. Fourth edition, 1887.

and around us is a Christian civilisation. What civilisation could do without Christianity for the greatest races of mankind, we know already. Philosophy and art, creative genius and practical energy, had their turn before the Advent; and we can register the results. I do not say that the great Greek and Roman ages lost—perhaps even they improved—the ethics of *meum* and *tuum*, in the interests of the leisured and favoured classes of society, as compared with what those ethics had been in archaic times. But they lost the hold which some earlier races within their sphere had had of the future life. They degraded, and that immeasurably, the position of woman. They effaced from the world the law of purity. They even carried indulgence to a worse than bestial type; and they gloried in the achievement.<sup>33</sup> Duty and religion, in the governing classes and the governing places, were absolutely torn asunder; and self-will and self-worship were established as the unquestioned rule of life. It is yet more important to observe that the very qualities which are commended in the Beatitudes, and elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount, and which form the base of the character specifically Christian, were for the Greek and the Roman mind the objects of contempt. From the history of all that has lain within the reach of the great Mediterranean basin, not a tittle of encouragement can be drawn for the ideas of those, who would surrender the doctrines of Christianity and yet retain its moral and spiritual fruits.

Does then that severance, unsustained by authority or by experience, commend itself at any single point by an improved conformity with purely abstract principles of philosophy? and is the new system better adapted to the condition and the needs of human nature, than the old? Does it better correspond with what an enlightened reason would dictate as the best provision for those needs? Does it mitigate, or does it enhance, the undoubted difficulties of belief? And if the answer must be given in the negative to both these inquiries, how are we to account for the strange phenomenon which exhibits to us persons sincerely, nay painfully, desirous of seeing Divine government more and more accepted in the world, yet enthusiastically busied in cutting away the best among the props, by which that government has been heretofore sustained?

As regards the first of these three questions, it is to be observed that, while the older religions made free use of prodigy and portent, they enjoyed these instruments for political rather than moral purposes; and it may be doubted whether the sum total of such action tended to raise the standard of life and thought. The general upshot was that the individual soul felt itself very far from God. Our bedimmed eye could not perceive His purity; and our puny reach could not find touch of His vastness. By the scheme of Redemption, this sense of distance was removed. The divine perfections were reflected

<sup>33</sup> See for instance the *Ἐρωτες* of Lucian.

through the medium of a perfect humanity, and were thus made near, familiar, and liable to love. The great all-pervading law of human sympathy became directly available for religion, and in linking us to the Divine Humanity, linked us by the same act to God. And this not for rare and exceptional souls alone, but for the common order of mankind. The direct contact, the interior personal communion of the individual with God was re-established: for human faculties, in their normal action, could now appreciate, and approach to, what had previously been inappreciable and unapproachable. Surely the system I have thus rudely exhibited was ideally a great philosophy, as well as practically an immeasurable boon. To strike out the redemptive clauses from the scheme is to erase the very feature by which it essentially differed from all other schemes; and to substitute a didactic exhibition of superior morality, with the rays of an example in the preterite tense, set by a dead man in Judea, for that scheme of living forces, by which the powers of a living Saviour's humanity are daily and hourly given to man, under a charter which expires only with the world itself. Is it possible here to discern, either from an ideal or from a practical point of view, anything but depletion and impoverishment, and the substitution of a spectral for a living form?

If we proceed to the second question, the spectacle, as it presents itself to me, is stranger still. Although we know that James Mill, arrested by the strong hand of Bishop Butler, halted rather than rested for a while in theism on his progress towards general negation, yet his case does not supply, nor can we draw from other sources, any reason to regard such a position as one which can be largely and permanently held against that relentless force of logic, which is ever silently at work to assert and to avenge itself. The theist is confronted, with no breakwater between, by the awful problem of moral evil, by the mystery of pain, by the apparent anomalies of waste and of caprice on the face of creation; and not least of all by the fact that, while the moral government of the world is founded on the free agency of man, there are in multitudes of cases environing circumstances independent of his will which seem to deprive that agency, called free, of any operative power adequate to contend against them. In this bewildered state of things, in this great enigma of the world, 'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? . . . Wherefore are thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?'<sup>34</sup> There has come upon the scene the figure of a Redeemer, human and divine. Let it be granted that the Incarnation is a marvel wholly beyond our reach, and that the miracle of the Resurrection to-day gives serious trouble to fastidious intellects. But the difficulties of a baffled understanding, lying everywhere around us in daily experience, are to be expected from its limitations; not so the shocks encountered by the moral sense. Even if the Christian scheme slightly lengthened the immeasurable catalogue of

<sup>34</sup> Is. lxiii. 1, 2.

the first, this is dust in the balance compared with the relief it furnishes to the second ; in supplying the most powerful remedial agency ever known, in teaching how pain may be made a helper, and evil transmuted into good ; and in opening clearly the vision of another world, in which we are taught to look for yet larger counsels of the Almighty wisdom. To take away, then, the agency so beneficent, which has so softened and reduced the moral problems that lie thickly spread around us, and to leave us face to face with them in all their original rigour, is to enhance and not to mitigate the difficulties of belief.

Lastly, it is not difficult to understand why those who prefer the Pagan ideal, or who cannot lay hold on the future world, or who labour under still greater disadvantages, should put aside as a whole the gospel of God manifest in the flesh. But Mrs. Ward is none of these ; and it is far harder to comprehend the mental attitude, or the mental consistency at least, of those who like her desire to retain what was manifested, but to thrust aside the manifesting Person, and all that His living personality entails: or, if I may borrow an Aristotelian figure, to keep the accidents and discard the substance. I cannot pretend to offer a solution of this hard riddle. But there is one feature which almost uniformly marks writers whose mind as in this case is of a religious tone, or who do not absolutely exclude religion, while they reject the Christian dogma and the authority of Scripture. They appear to have a very low estimate both of the quantity and the quality of sin: of its amount, spread like a deluge over the world, and of the subtlety, intensity, and virulence of its nature. I mean a low estimate as compared with the mournful denunciations of the sacred writings, or with the language especially of the later Christian Confessions. Now let it be granted that, in interpreting those Confessions, we do not sufficiently allow for the enormous differences among human beings—differences both of original disposition, and of ripened character. We do not sufficiently take account of the fact that, while disturbance and degradation have so heavily affected the mass, there are a happy few on whom nature's degeneracy has but lightly laid its hand. In the biography of the late Dr. Marsh we have an illustration apt for my purpose. His family was straitly Evangelical. He underwent what he deemed to be conversion. A like-minded friend congratulated his mother on the work of Divine grace in her son. But, in the concrete, she mildly resented the remark, and replied that in truth 'Divine grace would find very little to do in her son William.'

In the novel of *The Unclassed* by the author of *Thyrza*, which like *Robert Elsmere* is of the didactic and speculative class, the leading man-character, when detailing his mental history, says that 'sin' has never been for him a word of weighty import. So ingenuous a confession is not common. I remember but one exception to the rule that the negative writers of our own day have formed,

or at least have exhibited, a very feeble estimate of the enormous weight of sin, as a factor in the condition of man and of the world. That exception is Amiel. Mrs. Ward has prefixed to her translation of his remarkable and touching work an Introduction from which I make the following extract:—

His Calvinistic training lingers long in him; and what detaches him from the Hegelian school, with which he has much in common, is his own stronger sense of personal need, his preoccupation with the idea of sin. He speaks (says M. Renan contemptuously) of sin, of salvation, of redemption and conversion, as if these things were realities. He asks me, 'What does M. Renan make of sin?' 'Eh, bien, je crois que je le supprime.'

The closing expression is a happy one: sin is for the most part suppressed.

We are bound to believe, and I for one do believe, that in many cases the reason why the doctrines of grace, so profoundly embedded in the Gospel, are dispensed with by the negative writers of the day, is in many cases because they have not fully had to feel the need of them: because they have not travelled with Saint Paul through the dark valley of agonising conflict, or with Dante along the circle downward and the hill upward: because, having to bear a smaller share than others of the common curse and burden, they stagger and falter less beneath its weight.

But ought they not to know that they are physicians, who have not learned the principal peril of the patient's case, and whose prescription accordingly omits the main requisite for a cure? For surely in this matter there should be no mistake. As the entire Levitical institutions seem to have been constructed to impress upon the Hebrew mind a deep and definite idea of sin, we find in the New Testament that that portion of our Lord's work was so to speak ready-made. But He placed it at the foundation of His great design for the future. 'When the Comforter is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.'<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Ward seeks, and even with enthusiasm, to 'make for righteousness;' but the three terms compose an organic whole, and if a part be torn away the residue will bleed to death. For the present, however, we have only to rest in the real though but partial consolation that, if the ancient and continuous creed of Christendom has slipped away from its place in Mrs. Ward's brilliant and subtle understanding, it has nevertheless by no means lost a true, if unacknowledged, hold upon the inner sanctuary of her heart.

W. E. GLADSTONE.

<sup>35</sup> John xvi. 8.





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